Special Issue: **The Truth About Those Korean Atrocities**

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A Report on An Atrocity Report

Washington

The atrocity report issued by the Pentagon last week broke down its statistics into three classes: "reported," "probable" and "known victims." "Reported," it explains, "represents the maximum figure possible, or the total number actually reported in each case, *irrespective of the merits of the evidence contained therein.*" (Italics added.) "Probable," the next category, "represents an approximate true count of atrocity victims, since the figures under this heading show the number which, in the opinion of the legal officer who examined the file, are justified by the available proof and the general tenor of the report." Finally, " 'bodies recovered' and 'survivors' are self-explanatory terms, and definitely reflect known victims." The grand total is given as 57,559 "reported," 29,815 "probable," 10,032 "bodies" and 533 "survivors."

This is an unusual system of classification. It means that of 57,000 reported atrocities, the War Crimes Division of the Army regards almost half as improbable. It means that the Army's own investigators, after studying these reports, do not believe these atrocities ever happened. Why, then, include them in the grand totals, knowing that they may only inflate the headlines and exaggerate the toll?

The next category is also vague. This is not called "proven" but "probable." This "represents an approximate true count of atrocity victims" based on the judgment of the officer examining the file. The figure of 29,815 is only an estimate of probability. This is a loose method of estimating crime, and again encourages inflation in the headlines and a false impression in the reader's mind. For few newspaper readers will be aware of these classifications or their significance.

Dubious Confessions

What was the principal source of information on these atrocities? The report says "the bulk" of them were based on confessions by enemy prisoners in our hands. How is a prisoner prevailed upon to confess a crime against United Nations personnel for which he may suffer severe punishment, indeed death itself? Obviously such confessions will not be made voluntarily. A prisoner is not going to open up under interrogation and say, "Oh, by the way, I murdered several of your chaps recently." It would be interesting to know in how many cases the confessions were obtained by mistreatment or torture, as we claim (and quite correctly I believe) that the enemy elicited germ warfare "confessions" from some of our captured personnel. Confessions under torture may be entirely false.

The report itself reflects distrust of these atrocity confessions. It says, "Since the bulk of the cases opened were based initially upon the confession of a prisoner, it was essential that every effort be made to discover corroborating evidence to establish the fact that the incident had actually occurred, i.e., the corpus delecti."

The report says that during March, 1952, the atrocity cases were screened and placed in two categories: "those in which there was definite evidence of corpus delecti, or where a confessed perpetrator or eye-witness had, outside of the PW compound, verified his statement, and pointed out the location on the ground, and those others based solely on confessions or statements of a PW, without verifications." No figures are given on these two categories. It would be good to know how these figures broke down, why the Army was so distrustful of these confessions, and how they were obtained.

Wine and Rice for the Doomed

It is on such a confession that one of the biggest atrocity stories of the Korean war is based. Readers may remember that when Colonel James M. Hanley, Judge Advocate of the 8th Army, gave out his famous atrocity statement in Pusan on November 13, 1951, he said "Incidents involving the killing of from 1 to 1250 UN war prisoners at a time are recorded in the UNC files. The killing of 1250 involved Americans killed near the Yalu river in North Korea by North Koreans between the 16th and 18th of September 1950. The prisoners were transported from a prison camp near Pyongyang and shot in groups after being fed rice and wine according to the report of the incident." The wine and rice incident seemed a strange detail.

Now the same story turns up in this new report as "KWC #279, Slaughter of 1250 American Prisoners." The report says these prisoners "were slaughtered in cold blood by their Communist captors if the confession of a North Korean prisoner is true. Unfortunately, that is all the evidence contained in the file."

Incredible things happen in war, but it is hard to believe that mass murder could have been carried out on such a scale without finding at least one other witness or some corroborating detail among the tens of thousands of North Korean prisoners in UN hands. The report can only conclude, "Every effort should be expended to discover corroborating evidence for this reported atrocity." This one story accounts for 1250, or 20 percent, of the Army's estimate that a total of 6,113 American soldiers were "probably" the victims of atrocities.

Why Weren't the Criminals Held?

There is another sidelight on these confessions. A prisoner who confesses to the torture or murder of soldiers he has

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Few Atrocities Since the Early Days of The War . . .

himself taken prisoner is subject to punishment under the rules of war. He may be tried and convicted by the detaining power. The Army seems to have made no effort to prosecute, punish or even retain these self-confessed criminals. Its press officers now blame the release on the repatriation agreement. But the atrocity report itself says, "Three primary causes have resulted in the release from restriction or confinement of individuals implicated in war crimes. They are: closure of cases, Operation 'Little Switch,' and the mass breakouts of June, 1953." One would have thought the Army would at least have segregated the self-confessed perpetrators of such horrible crimes and kept them under special guard.

The report says that on June 30, 1953, War Crimes Division Files "contained 1615 alleged atrocity cases." As against this total, the report itself gives details on only 34. They are divided into two classes, "referable" cases, ready for trial, of which there are said to be 34 altogether, and "non-referable" cases "in which there is sufficient evidence to prove that the crime has been committed, but which have not been referred, primarily because no perpetrators are in custody." The total number of non-referable cases is not given.

One assumes that the 34 cases on which details are given in the report are among the best in the Army's files. They are interesting for several reasons. **The most important is that only one of these 34 cases is alleged to have been committed by Chinese and only one is alleged to have occurred since January, 1951, almost three years ago.**

Trying Hard to Prove a Point

The written summary of the one atrocity cited since January, 1951, begins, "Proving that the Communists still persist in committing atrocities, this recent case occurred on 21 September 1952." The date, more than a year ago, is not so "recent" at that. But the significant point is that the writer of the atrocity report felt under compulsion to prove "that the Communists still persist in committing atrocities." The fact is that two graphs in the appendix show that there have been very few atrocities in the past two years. Exhibit H shows no "referable" case since the early part of 1951. Exhibit C, "Monthly Totals of Atrocity Cases Classified According to Perpetrator," which covers all "reported" cases shows no Chinese atrocities reported since July, 1951, and only three small North Korean cases reported since that time, the last being the one mentioned above.

This latest atrocity of September, 1952, as cited by the report may be an atrocity or judging by the summary it may be the case of a terrible hand-to-hand fight. "An American forward observer team," the summary says, "and a squad of South Koreans occupied Hill 854 near Samchiyong. Their position was overrun by the enemy, but was recovered the following day in a counter-attack. The bodies of two U.S. soldiers, horribly mutilated, together with those of several South Koreans were discovered by a friendly patrol."

Even Sober Newspapers

"This report of grisly horror and calculated bestiality, of savage torture and cold-blooded massacre. . . ."

—New York Times, October 30

"To find an analogy to the atrocities perpetrated by the Communists in Korea one must go back to the sufferings of the European Jews at the hands of the Nazis. . . ."

—Washington Post, October 31

Confusion Well Confounded

Presumably the "referable" cases, set down "as being ready for trial" would be the best documented. But even among these the summaries reflect far from satisfactory proof. An example widely cited in the news stories is KWC #67, the Naedae Murders. The summary fails to tell when this happened and ends on a confusing note. "Photographs," it begins, "clearly reveal that the six American soldiers detained as prisoners in a Korean house near Naedae were shot in cold blood and probably bayonetted. Ironically, this slaughter took place in front of a Communist propaganda bulletin board. However there were five survivors, wounded in the massacre, who escaped by feigning death. In addition a captive North Korean sergeant has admitted participation in the murders. Close examination of the evidence leaves some doubt as to whether this case was properly referred, since there seems to be discrepancies between the confession and the survivors' statements."

The report gives ten other "referable" cases involving alleged atrocities against Americans. But one, KWC #125, is a case where two American soldiers were killed "in combat with North Korean soldiers" after a South Korean civilian

Other Testimony From Three Korean War Correspondents

"One of the 'Eight Rules of Conduct' laid down by Peking provides for the good treatment of captives. It is the Communist theory that this contributes to victory. . . . The Chinese were certainly far more correct than were the North Koreans. This is not surprising, as both North and South Koreans are notorious for their cruelty."

—Marguerite Higgins: War in Korea

"This period (December, 1950) was probably worst for the Americans, for there was in that army a very considerable fraction of young soldiers fed on the ideological spirit of the war. They had to think of the Chinese Communists as brutal tyrants and that the Southern Republic stood for freedom: as the tales of mild and correct behavior to prisoners and population by the Chinese began to filter through and revelations of the Republic's festering corruption piled up, these young men were left without ballast."

—Rene Cutforth (BBC Correspondent in Korea): Korean Reporter (London, 1952)

"Few attempts were made to explain to the American soldier why he was fighting. Publications similar to those of the British Army bureau of current affairs were naive in the extreme. The national hatred and fear of Communism was sufficient in most cases to inflame him with a rather indiscriminate bellgerence which showed itself in an ugly way, especially in the treatment of prisoners of war, who had to suffer the indignity of being stripped naked. It failed, however, to bring about any kind of sympathy for South Koreans. . . ."

Louis Heren (correspondent of the London Times in Korea): Brassey's Annual, The (British) Armed Forces Year-Book, 1951.

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. . . The Real Atrocity is The Spread of Poison Against Peace

had disclosed their hiding place to the enemy. "It is doubtful," the summary ends lamely, "that this case should be considered an atrocity, but appears at best to be a case of collaboration with the enemy." Three other "referable" cases involve the killing of wounded American prisoners by civilians.

Among the eight "referable" cases involving Koreans, one casts a grisly light on the reality of confessions. KWC #29 says, "Two North Korean officer prisoners have confessed to killing as many as 2000 'anti-Communists,' but check with natives indicate that approximately 80 were slain. Two survivors state that 16 were in the group with them, and that death in each case was by beating at the hands of a mob."

The Army Waxes Funny

There are evidences of cheerful humor on the Army's part in KWC #102. The summary says, "Obligingly cooperative, one North Korean prisoner stated that he was a member of the Education and Cultural Section in the village of Kwangju, and that in this capacity, together with two accomplices, on 16 September 1950, he took ten anti-Communist prisoners about eight kilometers in the country and there executed them. He adds that he used a carbine and did not bury the bodies. He desired to point out the sites, so accompanied by a war crimes investigator and a Korean detective from Kwangju, he directed them to the spot. Three badly decomposed bodies were found, and the suspect insisted that these were three of the ten victims he had helped murder. **The case was probably submitted to accomodate the confessor.**" (Italics added.)

Purpose

"The United States . . . is launching a counter attack on those who want to do business with Communist China. . . . Documented facts on Communist atrocities are likely to get wide scrutiny. Winning friends away from the U. S. and 'shooting its way into the United Nations' may become a harder job for Communist China."

—U. S. News & World Report, November 6

Another puzzler among these Korean "referable" cases is KWC #180. A junior lieutenant in the North Korean political police is alleged to have taken six political prisoners out of jail at Naju on September 28, 1950 "and as usual, without trial, shot and bayonetted them." The hands of the victims were tied behind them. "They were shot and the bayonet used for the 'coup de grace'." The lieutenant confessed. The puzzling part about this case is that the summary says, "Despite this treatment, five persons [of the six] survived, although one died shortly thereafter. All identify the confessor as the perpetrator."

The atrocity report is almost apologetic about the absence of material on the Chinese. "The predominance of North Korean incidents," it says, "is attributable to the fact that the bulk of those recorded occurred prior to the official (sic) entry of the Chinese into the war. Since October, 1950, however, the Chinese have been fully as active as the North Koreans." Though the Chinese may well have been "fully as active," the report only gives one case—a "nonreferable" one—of an atrocity alleged against the Chinese. A lieutenant survivor of a patrol ambushed on November 8, 1950, alleged that the Chinese set the wounded afire and bayonetted them. Corroboration is claimed by a medical officer who examined the bodies when they were later recovered.

The Report's Striking Omission

This paucity of cases alleging Chinese atrocities makes striking the omission from this report of the biggest shocker in Hanley's atrocity report two years ago. "The largest number of Americans known to have been killed by the Chinese," Colonel Hanley reported, "was a group of 200 U.S. Marines killed on December 10, 1950, near Sinhung on orders of the regimental commander of the 23rd Regiment of the 81st Division of the CCF [Chinese Communist Forces]."

No mention of this alleged crime is made in the new report. When the writer asked the Pentagon press office why it was omitted, he was given various answers, among them (1) that the new report was only an "excerpt" and did not cover all cases, (2) that the War Crimes Division did not have that case yet (3) that this case was KWC #661, and included in the reported totals but that the actual file had not yet been forwarded from Korea, (4) that Korea has "a great many more cases" and (5) that while these other cases are covered in the report totals, physical possession of them is still held in Korea. A phonograph record of these replies would be a treasure.

Two years ago, when this same Marine atrocity made the headlines, this writer was told at Marine Corps HQ that it had no record of any such atrocity and did not believe it had occurred. Last week, when the writer went from the Pentagon to Marine HQ on the same story, a query elicited the unusual response of a written statement, with permission to quote and attribute. "This HQ," said the Marine Corps statement, "was never able to confirm the news report published in 1951 to the effect that 200 American Marines were victims of atrocities 10 December 1950 by members of the Chinese Communist Forces. At that time the total number of Marines missing in action was less than 200. Since the Armistice 39 Marines have been repatriated who were captured prior to 10 December 1950 thereby decreasing the number who could have been killed on that date. There has been no information received from returned prisoners," the official U.S. Marine statement continued, "which would corroborate this story. This story is based on the statement of one captured Chinese soldier." *(Continued on Page 4)*

ONLY THIRTY COPIES

Of the atrocity report were made available to the press last week by the Pentagon. Most newspapermen had to depend on the wire service summaries. At the UN the American delegation made public only a three paragraph memorandum. The distortions in such cursory coverage led us to devote the bulk of this week's issue to a full study of the report. In this I believe the *Weekly* again performs a public service no other publication has rendered. Extra copies are available on request. But don't forget we need your renewal—or new subscription—NOW to stay alive and continue the fight. The rate is still only $5 a year and you can get a two year sub or give a gift sub to a friend for only $4 extra by using the coupon on page four TODAY.

With many thanks, I. F. Stone.

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Using Atrocities to Plug for A Bigger Arms Budget

What the Report Really Shows

What this report really shows is that after the terrible brutality which marked the Korean civil conflict on both sides in the early months of the war, conditions improved from the time the Chinese intervened in the fighting. There is back-handed admission of this in the lush double-talk of the report itself. It divides atrocities into "acts of commission and acts of omission" and then says, "The former, the acts of brutality such as wilful murder, attempted murder, mutilation, and various forms of torture, have greatly declined from the shocking rate prevalent in the early stages of the war."

"However," the report continues, "as the war progressed and more men fell into the hands of the enemy, coupled with his limited ability to provide sufficient food, proper medical care, necessary clothing and shelter resulted in appalling death rates in the various camps and collecting points." It said that on the marches to prison camps "most deaths resulted from non-treatment of combat wounds aggravated by lack of water, food and clothing." It was "in this initial stage of capture," the report admits, "where most acts of violence were perpetrated against the prisoners." Other deaths resulted from "malnutrition and dysentery" on the way to the final camps. These are not atrocities in the real meaning of the term, or as understood by the public.

The report goes on to say, "The Chinese, soon after the beginning of the truce talks in July, 1951, realizing the propaganda value of prisoners, commenced a 'program of leniency' which resulted in slightly better treatment of captured personnel." It continues, "Medical care, still woefully lacking, was augmented with some of the newer drugs to combat disease and infections. The quantity of food, still pitifully low, was raised to a more life-sustaining level."

For a report which begins by equating the Chinese Communists with the Nazis, these are considerable admissions. They admit that real atrocities fell off after the early months of the war, that mistreatment of prisoners occurred on the marches to the camps rather than in them, and that the Chinese two and a half years ago began to improve the treatment of the wounded and the feeding of prisoners.

The Real Atrocity

The real atrocity is this report itself. The Korean war has been unusually horrible. Both North and South Koreans have acted with shocking brutality. Our own treatment of prisoners has been far from exemplary. The report can serve no purpose other than to inflame public opinion. The report is a sloppy and mendacious job, typical of the stuff the military has poured out in this war in its constant effort to control and poison the American mind.

The final touch was the statement with which Secretary of the Army Stevens accompanied the release. "This report," Stevens said, "describing the cold-blooded program of torture and murder carried on by the Communist enemy in Korea, is one of the best answers that can be given to anyone who questions the need of strong military defenses for our country and the free world." So the atrocity story ended with a plug for a bigger military budget.

Weird Statistics

Earlier atrocity reports including Colonel Hanley's as Judge Advocate of the Eighth Army may be found analyzed in I. F. Stone's *Hidden History of the Korean War.* This is how the figures now stack up:

1. General Ridgway's report to the UN dated November 12, 1951, said "As of July 20, 1951, approximately 8,000 United States military personnel have been reported killed as war crimes victims. Of this number, approximately 7,000 were reported killed by North Koreans and the remainder by Chinese Communists."

2. Colonel Hanley's report as head of the war crimes division in Pusan next day, November 13, 1951, said Chinese Communists had killed 2,513 American prisoners of war. Hanley gave the total number killed in atrocities as 5,500. Hanley's total was 2,500 less than Ridgway's, but his total of those killed by the Chinese was 1,500 greater.

3. Colonel Hanley in a follow up statement from Pusan three days later, November 16, 1951, raised the total to 6,270.

4. General Ridgway in a statement from Tokyo four days later, November 20, 1951, said "possibly" 6,000 Americans had been killed in war atrocities but placed the number of those "definitely known" as victims at 365.

5. Now, as of June 30, 1953, the Korea War Crmes Division places the number of "probable" victims at 6,113 and attributes 2,178 of these to the Chinese. No "definitely known" figure is given.

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